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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 NEW DELHI 000623

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IN

SUBJECT: INFLUENTIAL DEOBAND MADRASSA GATHERING DECLARES
TERRORISM UN-ISLAMIC

REF: NEW DELHI 574

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: At a February 25 conference at the influential and conservative Darul Uloom madrassa in Deoband, Uttar Pradesh, approximately 10,000 - 15,000 Islamic clerics declared terrorism un-Islamic. In equal measure, the declaration by clerics of the madrassa regarded as the ideological home of the Taliban also took a swipe at U.S. foreign policy and the GOI for what the clerics believe to be heavy-handed and discriminatory law enforcement tactics in fighting terrorism. Darul Uloom's directors invited Muslim clerics from different Sunni groups including Barelvi, Ahle Hadith, and Jamaat-i-Islami Hind, as well as Shia clergy. While all groups were represented, contacts report prominent Barelvi and Shia clergy did not attend, making it primarily a Deobandi affair. Nonetheless, the significance of such a declaration from the heart of conservative South Asian Islam cannot be underestimated. Two former embassy International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) participants helped organize the meeting while at least ten former IVs attended. Deoband has never sought media attention, but tacit political pressure from GOI, a realization by madrassa elders that their image was deteriorating, and a willing media forum to air their grievances likely prompted the declaration and the associated coverage. While the declaration obviously won't end terrorism and domestic political considerations are never far away, Deoband's willingness to denounce terrorism publicly must be taken as a positive sign that will influence the thinking of Muslims from Afghanistan to Indonesia who listen to what Deoband has to say. The USG should refrain from commenting on the declaration publicly, but should capitalize on this development by quietly offering Deoband educational resources and continuing to issue invitations for its clerics and students to participate in International Visitor programs in the U.S. There is an ACTION REQUEST in para 12. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The full text of the declaration follows at the end

of this cable in para 13.

Terrorism un-Islamic, but Also...

¶3. (U) The influential conservative Darul Uloom madrassa in Deoband, Uttar Pradesh, viewed by some as the ideological home of the Taliban (a claim Darul Uloom refutes), hosted an All India Terrorism Conference on February 25 (reftel). The gathering of roughly 10,000 - 15,000 clerics from all sects of Islam jointly issued a declaration condemning terrorism as un-Islamic. The clerics defined terrorism as, "Any action that targets innocents, whether by an individual or by any government and its agencies or by a private organization anywhere in the world constitutes, according to Islam, an act of terrorism." Highlights from the conference include:

-- Terrorism completely negates the teachings of Islam, which is the faith of love and peace.

-- Killing of innocents is not compatible with Islam. It is un-Islamic.

-- Islam sternly condemns all kinds of oppression, violence and terrorism.

Muslim Grievances with GOI...

¶4. (U) While condemning terrorism, the declaration also called for "an end to the campaign of maligning the madrassas as breeding grounds of terrorism and dubbing the entire community as terrorists." The declaration denounced the "biased and discriminatory attitude of the government against the Muslim community," and cited the Naxalites as a counter-example. Innocent Muslims associated with madrassas live in fear of being framed by anti-Muslim officials any

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time the Naxalites attack, the clerics claimed. Meanwhile the government takes no effective steps to stop Naxal insurgency and Muslims "are forced to bear many intolerable tortures" at the hands of the state, according to the declaration.

...and the West

¶5. (U) The clerics also accuse the Indian government of appeasement to the "tyrant and colonial master of the West," which applies double standards on democracy and human rights. The West's (read U.S.'s) policies of "aggression, barbarism and state-sponsored terrorism not only in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan but also in Bosnia and various South American countries have surpassed all the records known to human history." The declaration goes on to claim that, "the internal and external policies of our country are getting heavily influenced by these forces."

Inclusive, but Mainly a Deobandi Show

¶6. (U) Darul Uloom organizers sent invitations to leaders from many different Sunni groups including Barelvi, Ahle Hadith, and Jamaat-i-Islami Hind, as well as Shia clergy. Political Section contacts reported that in the days leading to the conclave, it was uncertain if the differing factions would attend. No group boycotted the conference but contacts as well as some media accounts report that no prominent Barelvi or Shia leaders participated. Maulana Kalbe Jawwad of Lucknow, one of the most prominent Shia clerics in India, did not attend but he did issue a statement supporting the declaration. Urdu magazine editor Qari Mazhari told a Political Section FSN, "Most Barelvi leaders did not participate. It was a show of Deobandis."

India First, Islam Second?

¶7. (U) Though critical of the Indian government and its policies, the declaration does not attack India, referring to the country as "our great nation." Further, the clerics ask that Muslims "continue, as they always did in the past, their loyalty towards the dear motherland," and "not be employed as tools of evil by anti-Islamic or anti-national forces." However, just a few lines away the decree advises, "that (the) most important things are Islam and practicing it," and that, "worldly situations deteriorate because of the non-practice of Islamic teaching."

A Media Event

¶8. (SBU) Indian press heavily covered the event. It was the first time Deoband's elders allowed media coverage of a meeting at the conservative madrassa, which only recently issued a fatwa on its website banning personal photographs. When Poloff visited Deoband in November 2007, the madrassa's leaders implored Poloff to spread the word that Deoband was not associated with the Taliban and refuted terrorism. Poloff responded that Deoband itself needed to make these arguments publicly. It should be noted that two former IVLP participants helped organize the conference and at least ten former IVs attended. This suggests that the embassy's efforts for years to engage the Deobandi community are at least contributing in some fashion to the adjustment of attitudes among some of India's Muslim leaders.

Welcome Public Statements... Which Won't End the Debate

¶9. (SBU) Comment: The importance of the declaration from such a prominent Muslim institution cannot be underestimated, and may have an impact on Muslims from Afghanistan to

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Indonesia who look to Deoband for leadership. It must be noted, however, that the grievances against GOI and the anti-West sentiments are as much a part of the declaration as the anti-terror message. The invitation to other Sunni sects and Shias signals another important step toward reconciliation with other sub-continental Muslims. Though not formally affiliated, Deobandi madrassas in Pakistan and Bangladesh will likely take note of the declaration. The Taliban claim to be influenced by Deobandi teachings, though the madrassa's leaders repeatedly disavowed the Taliban during Poloff's November 2007 visit, and the declaration's impact on the Taliban and other Jihadis is uncertain. Recently, however, when asked by the press whether suicide bombings constituted "terror acts," Vice Rector Maulana Abdul Khaleque Madrasi responded that Islam prohibits, "all forms of violence used to kill innocent individuals." This leaves the door slightly open for interpretation. But for the vast majority of Indian Muslims, the pronouncement against terrorism should be clear.

¶10. (SBU) Comment Continued: Some commentators have criticized the declaration and sought to downplay the influence of Deoband in the everyday lives of Indian Muslims, but the madrassa's willingness to engage publicly must be taken as a positive sign. Without the grievances, a simple "Terrorism is un-Islamic" statement would frankly carry less weight. We expect the declaration will generate a lively but civil public debate within India and beyond on Islam, terrorism, and GOI and Western policies. Such an open, public discussion should be viewed as a welcome development.

True Education Reform Remains Key

¶11. (SBU) Comment Continued: While the declaration is a

welcome and overdue symbol, more important were the less well reported discussions on how to incorporate formal education subjects such as math and science into the madrassa curriculum. The realization from leading madrassas that they must modernize represents a significant first step. The GOI will release details of a madrassa modernization program later next month. Embassy contacts relayed that GOI "blessed" the conference and a senior Muslim journalist from Lucknow told a Political Section FSN, "GOI is planning to announce sops and concessions before the parliamentary elections. Such conferences are moves in the right direction for getting the center's attention." We hope the government's program will offer concrete solutions rather than just an election season sop to the Congress Party's Muslim vote bank. The conference conveniently provides the government the cover it needs to face down "soft on terror" and "Muslim appeasement" charges from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) opposition when it announces new Muslim focused spending in the current parliamentary budget session. End Comment.

¶12. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST FOR SCA, ECA, P, R, and NSC: We should capitalize immediately on this positive development. The Deobandis remain wary of the USG, and harshly critical of its policies, but they continue to engage at the personal level with representatives of the U.S. Embassy. We tried a few years ago to offer them computers for madrassa education, but were turned down. We propose that we try to identify a third party (perhaps one of USAID's partners in programs in curriculum development) through which we could offer technical assistance and other support. In addition, we should immediately look at ways to fund a special annual group IVLP for clerics and students from the madrassa to visit the U.S. and meet USG officials and private Americans. A little money spent now to show our appreciation for Deoband's moderate tilt could continue to pay dividends for years to come as we struggle against violent extremism in Islam. Please see septel for more detailed information on post's previous Muslim community IVLP participants. ACTION

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REQUEST: We would welcome Washington's views on whether such resources can be offered to Deoband.

¶13. (U) Begin text of declaration (all spelling as received).

DECLARATION

All India Anti - Terrorism Conference Organized by: Rabta Madaris Islamiah (Islamic Madrasas Association) Darul Uloom Deoband, on 17 Safar 1429 H = 25 February 2008 Monday

Chaired by: Hazrat Maulana Marghoobur Rahman Sahib, Mohtamim Darnl Uloom Deoband & President of Islamic Madrasas Association, Darul Uloom Deoband

Islam is the religion of mercy for all humanity. It is the fountainhead of eternal peace, tranquility, security. Islam has given so much importance to human beings that it regards the killing of a single person the of killing the entire humanity, without differentiation based on creed and caste. Its teaching of peace encompasses all humanity. Islam has taught its followers to treat all mankind with equality, mercy, tolerance, justice. Islam sternly condemns all kinds of oppression, violence and terrorism. It has regarded oppression, mischief, rioting and murdering among severest sins and crimes.

This All India Anti-Terrorism Conference attended by the representatives of all Muslim schools of thought organised by Rabta Madaris Islamiah Arabia (Islamic Madrasas Association), Darul Uloom Deoband condemns all kinds of violence and terrorism in the strongest possible terms. The Conference expresses its deep concern and agony on the present global and national alarming conditions in which most of the nations

are adopting such an attitude against their citizens especially Muslims to appease the tyrant and colonial master of the West, which cannot be justified in any way. It is a matter of greater concern that the internal and external policies of our country are getting heavily influenced by these forces. Their aggression, barbarism and state-sponsored terrorism not only in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan but also in Bosnia and various South American countries have surpassed all the records known to human history. Contrary to it, our great nation has always been known for impartiality and its moral and spiritual values. Now the situation has worsened so far that every Indian Muslim especially those associated with madrasas, who are innocent with good record of characters, are always gripped by the fear that they might be trapped by the administrative machinery anytime. And, today countless number of innocent Muslims are spending their lives behind the bars and are forced to bear many intolerable tortures. And, those spreading terror, attacking police stations, killing the police in broad daylight and showing illegal arms are roaming about freely with no effective and preventive steps being taken by the government to check their acts of terrorism and violence. This partial attitude has put a big question mark on the secular character of the government posing great threats to the country. Therefore, this All India Anti-Terrorism Conference strongly condemns this attitude and expresses its deep concern on this partiality of government officials and declares its continuous joint struggles for domination of law, justice and secular system.

This conference strongly demands the Indian Government to curb those maligning the madras as and Muslims. The administrative machinery should be demanded to conduct impartial investigations in activities disturbing public peace in the country and to punish only those found guilty. It also demands to free the accused if he is found innocent and punish severely those officials who accused him of crimes of terrorism. No person of any particular community should be suspected without solid reasons. In short, the government agencies must fulfill their duty justly without any prejudice

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and bias so that real peace and security may prevail in the country.

This All India Anti-Terrorism Conference appeals to all intellectuals, writers and media persons to independently and honestly analyze the national and international affairs and avoid to biased and partial attitudes.

Moreover, this All India anti-Terrorism Conference attended by the representatives of all schools of thought appeal to all Muslims to continue, as they always did in the past, their loyalty towards the dear motherland and love and respect towards humanity. It appeals to them to fully understand the present alarming situation, the gravity and intensity of the time, and feel the pulse of the present world so that they might not be employed as tools of evils by anti-Islamic or anti-national forces. It pleads to them to live with dignity and pride being faithful to the country, to keep full trust on their leadership, render full support to Islamic madarsas which are valuable assets of the Muslim Ummah, spend their lives in the country following Islamic Shariah and teachings with full confidence. They should always remember that most important things are Islam and practicing it, and, hence, their prime focus should be on enriching their lives with good deeds and noble manners as, in fact, worldly situations deteriorate because of non-practice of Islamic teachings.

Need for holding state-wise conferences against terrorism.

This meeting of working committee of All India madarsas association feels necessary to hold state-wise conferences as it held this grand conference in view of the existing situations. The present situation of the country demands the

joint and constant efforts being made to denounce terrorism, biased and discriminatory attitudes of the government against the Muslim community. It needs such conferences to be held in the major places of all the states. This meeting appeals to Darnl Uloom Deoband to act as a leader in this direction.

Issued by: Central office, Islamic Madrasas Association

End text of declaration.
MULFORD